Chapter 3.2

Common Assumptions and Assessment Guidelines

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3.2 Common Assumptions and Assessment Guidelines

A number of common assumptions and assessment guidelines were followed during the preparation of this DEIS and during the preparation of the technical reports referenced in Section 3.1, *Introduction*. These common assumptions and assessment guidelines are listed below. Assumptions and guidelines for specific resource areas are summarized in the appropriate resource topics in this chapter.

- This DEIS is intended to satisfy National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements for those features that are well defined and will serve as a programmatic DEIS for less well-defined features. It may be used to tier future NEPA compliance as project features mature.
- This DEIS may not achieve final environmental compliance for all

- subsequent water conversion actions associated with the selected alternative. This DEIS will cover the water source(s) for the expansion of the Jonathan Rogers Water Treatment Plant. It also will cover the 2-for-1 exchange agreement, the conservation savings from the construction of the American Canal Extension, deliveries in excess of 3.5 ac-ft/ac, and the additional acreage of EPWU/PSB-owned land above the 2,000 ac limit. As such, it will fully address the sources of water associated with the upcoming first implementation contract pursuant to the generic Third Party Contract (No. 00-WC-40-R6460) dated December 1, 1999, between the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR), El Paso County Water Improvement District No. 1 (EPCWID No. 1), and the El Paso Water Utilities/Public Service Board (EPWU/PSB).
- USBR believes further NEPA compliance for each subsequent implementation contract is likely to be required once specific water sources and quantities are identified in later implementation contracts between the USBR, municipalities, and the irrigation districts. As those details become known, subsequent NEPA documents would then summarize the issues discussed in this programmatic DEIS, incorporate those discussions by reference, and concentrate on the issues specific to the subsequent action. This is a process commonly referred to as "tiering."
- Tiering will allow elimination of repetitive discussion of the same issues in subsequent NEPA documents. Tiering also will help the lead agencies focus on the issues that are now ready for a decision and exclude from final decision making any issues that are not.
- The planning horizon for this project is 30 years. Some project features would not be constructed for 20 or 30 years and are, therefore, viewed only at the conceptual level at this time.
- Project features were designed to a level that allows reasonable approximations for assessing potential project impacts and recommendation of appropriate mitigation measures.
- Implementation of any of the alternatives' features is subject to land owner approval.
- Data sources and collection methods, impact analysis techniques, and significance criteria are described in technical work plans that were prepared and reviewed by technical resource committees. These work plans were approved by the New Mexico–Texas Water Commission and the project Steering Committee.
- Data and analysis presented in this DEIS are derived from the four technical reports, which were reviewed and commented on by appropriate federal, state, and local agencies.
- Environmental resource data have been developed and analyzed to the level of detail necessary to distinguish project effects (both beneficial and adverse), to understand potential impacts of the Preferred Alternative and the other action alternatives, and to describe expected trends and future conditions under the No Action Alternative.
- The hydrology model (Boyle Engineering Stream Simulation Model [BESTSM]) developed for this study

provides the best available representation of current and predicted project area surface water and ground water conditions.

- The hydrology model is the basis for assessing flow-related impacts on biological resources (aquatic resources, wildlife resources, wetland/ riparian resources, threatened and endangered species), and for evaluating water quality effects.
- Estimates of water conversions and related impacts for the Preferred Alternative and other action alternatives were prepared independently from the hydrology model, which focuses only on water quantity and quality.
- All entities responsible for implementing and operating the project and its features would remain the same during the 30-year planning horizon.
- Implementation of any of the action alternatives would require modification by the Rio Grande Compact Commission of accounting procedures to accommodate year-round releases of Rio Grande Project water.
- Mitigation measures would be implemented concurrent with the construction of project features.
- Standard operating procedures (SOPs) and best management practices (BMPs) designed to avoid or reduce potential short-term and long-term impacts would be implemented during the construction and operation of all project features.
- Fish and wildlife enhancements are considered to be project features that would improve environmental and recreation values in the project area, and are not intended to serve as mitigation measures.
- Implementation of the fish and wildlife enhancements is directly tied to the construction schedule and costs of the various project features.
- Potential environmental effects associated specifically with water acquisition for the current expansion of the Jonathan Rogers Water Treatment Plant (WTP) from 40 million gallons per day (mgd) to 60 mgd are included in the effects analysis contained in this DEIS. All other potential environmental effects associated with the 40 to 60 mgd expansion are addressed in a separate Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact (Environmental Protection Agency 1998) and, therefore, are not included in this DEIS.